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ABSTRACT

To determine the relationship of referent group characteristics and communication variables to the public opinion process, interviews were conducted with 297 Madison, Wisconsin adults, located in 31 neighborhoods. Working within selected topics, opinions were measured through the use of a series of short statements about various controversial issue of interest to the individuals. After hearing opinion statements that briefly described both sides of an issue, the respondents were asked to place themselves in a situation where they would present their opinions on the same issues. Respondents were also asked their perception of what their neighbors and individuals in the city of Madison would "hold" as opinions on the various issues. Results showed that respondents tended to see themselves as being close to their neighbors, but not necessarily similar to those neighbors, and to see their neighbors either as having the same opinions as they had, or more conservative opinions than their own. Respondents also seemed either to use little internal and external communication in the public opinion process, or to use mainly external communication for verification or support of their own opinions and opinion perceptions. It was concluded that referent groups and their relation to communication and to perceptions of others' opinions and statements of own opinions should be considered a vital part of the public opinion process. (HOD)

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THE COMMUNICATION OF PUBLIC OPINION

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The Communication of Public Opinion

"Public opinion" has been one of the most used, but perhaps least articulated concepts in social science research and discourse. Over the years it has been defined in a variety of ways, ranging from a "state of consciousness" perspective where public opinion is viewed as a stable entity, often with a life of its own (cf., MacKinnon, 1828; Bryce, 1900) to a "situational" perspective where public opinion is seen as the response of a collection of individuals who actually form and express opinions on specific issues at particular times (e.g., Lowell, 1913; Childs, 1939).

Many approaches to public opinion research seem to approximate the one embodied in public opinion polling, where public opinion is assumed to be the responses, aggregated across individuals, to a number of items on a poll or survey. Indeed, if one assumes that polling is "reliable", it may be suggested that social scientists believe "public opinion" is what public opinion polls attempt to tabulate (cf., Moodie, 1975 for a discussion).

A fundamental criticism of the definition of public opinion as the aggregation of individual responses has been presented by Arthur Schlesinger Jr., who states that this approach stresses...

essentially, I would suppose, what people think they think. It does not report what people really think, because people ordinarily don't know what they really think in advance of a situation which compels them to act on the basis of their thoughts. Public opinion (polling) in short, elicits essentially an irresponsible expression of opinion... (Schlesinger, 1964, p. 532-3).

Moodie (1975) notes that a criticism such as the above "strikes an immediately responsive chord", for he says, "in our everyday speech and actions we are normally far from ready to accept verbal behavior as

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sufficient evidence for the nature of other people's 'real' opinions" (Moodie, 1975, p. 192). If it is further assumed that many individuals are not disposed to self-examination or reflection or that many are not well practiced in the skill of articulating ideas, then it becomes even more likely that expressed opinion may be a misleading guide to a person's actions.

Recently, public opinion researchers have begun to consider perceptions of others' opinions as an important component of public opinion (cf., Fields and Schuman, 1976; Noelle-Neumann, 1977; Lemert; 1981, Glynn, 1983; 1984). Such perceptual approaches to public opinion can be tied loosely to person perception research, where researchers are concerned with ways in which perceivers process and interpret information they acquire about others, how they form impressions and make judgments about others and how they explain the behavior of others (Berkowitz, 1981).

The relationship of perceptions to other variables stems from a view of human action that suggests that individual attitudes and actions are influenced not only by "objective reality", but also "by their beliefs about that world" (Fields, 1971). As Lemert (1981) notes, the perceiver uses a more or less subjective process to try to construct an impression of the current state of public opinion or to try to anticipate a public reaction to a move being considered. Thus, in addition to being a summary of individual opinions, public opinion may be an assessment or perception of an on-going process, external to the individual.

In a recent paper concerning the construct validation of the concept "public opinion", Glynn (1984) determined that statements of own public opinions, and perceptions of others' opinions play a role in the public

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opinion process. Indeed, the dominant pattern of Glynn's research findings suggest that perceptions of others' opinions are more stable factors in the public opinion process than are statements of own opinions. Own opinion responses are more variable, resulting in a wider distribution of responses.

Although some researchers consider the perceptual component of public opinion to be important only in terms of key decision-makers (cf., Lemert, 1981), this relatively narrow definition may not be fitting in many cases. Indeed, some theorists stress the importance of the general public's assessment or perception of opinions in social situations. They believe this observation of the social environment is extremely important to the individual as the fear of isolation from significant others is very strong (Noelle-Neumann, 1977). Findings from Glynn's (1984) research suggest that individuals do perceive opinions held by various referent groups and that these perceptions are group-specific. That is, individuals belong to a number of referent groups and seem to have different perceptions of opinions "held" by each one.

The purpose of the present study is to determine the relationship of referent group characteristics and communication variables to the public opinion process. In this study, perceptions of others' opinions is viewed as a component of public opinion. In addition to being a summary of individuals' own opinions, public opinion is considered to be an assessment or perception of an on-going process, external to the individual and dependent upon the referent group being considered. For this purpose, the referent group is the "neighborhood", defined as those individuals associating with each other within a specific geographical space (individuals living next

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door to or across the street from each other on the same street). Obviously, referent groups often exist within specific psychological spaces (e.g., colleagues working together at distant universities) or within specifically defined communication networks of friends, co-workers or others. The geographical definition of referent group is used here because of time and money limitations in the construction of the methodological technique.

There are advantages to analyzing "public opinion" in a neighborhood setting. The neighborhood provides the opportunity to study a collection of people with similar educational, occupational and status backgrounds. This is a most fundamental advantage involving a basic principle of human communication, that the transfer of ideas most frequently occurs between a source and a receiver who have certain similarities (Rogers, 1973). It has long been known that the neighborhood is a central location for the aggregation of individuals with these types of similarities (Winkel, 1981). Rogers (1973) stresses that this "physical and social propinquity" leads to an important research setting in which to study interpersonal communication. Such commonality between individuals makes it more likely for them to communicate, and in turn, more likely that the communication will be meaningful.

Communication and Public Opinion

Because public opinion is examined as a subjective phenomenon and is thought of not only as individual expressions of opinions but also as the perceptions of opinions "held" by those within specific referent groups, communication is an important consideration. Based on previous research (Noelle-Neumann, 1982; Lemert, 1981), it follows that statements of own opinions and perceptions of others' opinions on various issues are most likely formed and affected by the availability of information and constraints on receiving that information.

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The degrees of availability and constraints on receiving information will result in varied perceptions and expressions of opinions among the individuals examined. People sensing approval of their own internalized opinions will be willing to speak out their "true" opinions publicly; people believing there is opposition to their points of view will be less likely to speak out. Individuals communicating extensively with others in the referent group will be likely to have well-formed perceptions (whether accurate or inaccurate) of the opinions these groups of others "hold". Thus, perceptions of opinions and statements of own opinions will probably be formed and influenced by three major information sources: direct observation by the individual of behaviors of others in the system, formation through assimilation of information obtained through internal (within referent group) sources such as interpersonal communication, and formation through assimilation of information obtained through external (outside of referent group) sources such as the mass media. Internal and external communication will be considered in the present study.

Internal communication provides members of a referent group with information about others' opinions, beliefs and perceptions of opinions within the referent group. This type of communication allows immediate reflection of internal beliefs and values. For the present study, internal communication is limited to interpersonal communication. This limitation is made possible by the introduction of the neighborhood (a city block) as the unit of analysis. If the group were larger (e.g., a community) then internal communication would become a more complex variable with community newspapers or other within-referent group communication outlets taken into consideration.

External communication provides a link between referent groups in much the same way that internal communication provides a link between members of

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a given referent group. In addition, external communication allows members of a referent group to compare their own group with others in similar or disparate circumstances. External communication thus provides a "norm" with which to compare one's own group with varieties of other groups while internal communication provides a guide to the norms or opinions within the group.

Theoretically, any source outside the referent group such as fellow workers, friends and family could be considered an external communicator. However, for the purpose of the present study, external communication will be limited to the mass media. The importance of mass media as a form of external communication should not be underestimated. Tichenor and Wackman (1973) suggest that "the distribution of public opinion on an issue may be dependent upon patterns of media exposure". In fact, an infrequent but persistent question asked by researchers has concerned the extent to which the media fulfill the function of providing information about the "real" state of public opinion. Central to Noelle-Neumann's (1977) thesis is the notion that the media have, in fact, come to substitute for referent groups in influencing public opinion formation.

Group Influence and Public Opinion

Shaw (1981) states that "the way groups are assembled from a given set of persons is an important determinant of group process." It is necessary to consider some of these assemblies and evaluate some of their consequences for public opinion formation and opinion holding. In order to investigate such group influence on the public opinion process, two important variables will be considered; the degree of group cohesion and the degree of group similarity.

Although there have been several meanings attached to the term "cohesiveness", most persons who use the term "agree that it refers to the degree to which

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members are motivated to remain in the group" (Shaw, 1981). Members of highly cohesive groups are more energetic in group activities, are less likely to be absent from group meetings and are happy when the group succeeds, sad when it fails and so forth. Individuals in less cohesive groups are less concerned about the group's activities.

Group similarity in the present study refers to the perceived commonality of each individual in the group to others in the group with regard to such attitude areas as values, opinions and political views. Although a number of studies have found group similarity of attitudes to be a determinant of interpersonal attraction (e.g., Byrne and Griffitt, 1966), few studies have dealt with the relationship of attitude similarity in terms of group communication patterns and opinion formation.

A major difference between group similarity and group cohesion is that the former emphasizes commonality within the group whereas the latter emphasizes patterns of interaction (e.g., engagement in numerous activities) within the group. Degree of similarity is a perceptual-attitudinal concept concerning individuals' perceptions of their own values, beliefs and opinions in relation to others within the group; the cohesion concept is more behavioral, with group activities and interaction being the primary focus.

The relationship of group cohesion and similarity and internal and external communication to the public opinion process will be considered by investigating public opinion as an interaction between own stated opinions and perceptions of others' opinions. The following hypotheses will be considered:

1. Group Characteristics and Communication

It is expected that individuals in cohesive groups are more likely to discuss issues and opinions with other members. In turn, this discussion is expected to increase group cohesion. Similarity of a group member's beliefs,

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attitudes and values when compared to others' beliefs, attitudes and values should be confirmed or disconfirmed through the use of internal communication. Less cohesive individuals and individuals who perceive others as dissimilar from themselves should tend to rely on external communication more than would highly cohesive individuals and those who see themselves as similar to others within the referent group.

H1: Highly cohesive individuals should use more internal communication than less cohesive individuals. No such differences should exist between perceived similar and dissimilar groups. Less cohesive individuals and those who see others as dissimilar from themselves should tend to use external communication for exposure to others' beliefs, attitudes and values.

2. Group Characteristics and Public Opinion

As previously described, public opinion is considered to be an interaction between stated and perceived opinions. Concern in the present paper is not with the distribution of that public opinion per se (see Glynn, 1984 for construct validation), but rather with more complex relationships that affect the formation of that distribution. It is predicted that group characteristics will affect the public opinion process by allowing individuals to project differences or similarities of others' opinions when compared to their own.

H2: Individuals who are highly cohesive and who perceive that they are similar to others in their group are likely to see others as holding the same opinions as they themselves hold; individuals who are not cohesive with members of their referent group and who do not see themselves as similar to these members will tend to perceive that others will have opinions different from their own.

H3: Individuals who see themselves as similar to members of the referent group but who are not cohesive with these members will still tend to see others' opinions as similar to their own. On the other hand, individuals who are highly cohesive but who do not see themselves as similar to others will tend to perceive these others as holding opinions different from their own.

3. Communication and Public Opinion

Communication should enter into the public opinion process by allowing individuals exposure to referent group opinions through the use of internal communication and exposure to opinions of others outside of the immediate referent group through the use of external communication. The projection of others' opinions, and thus the total public opinion perspective, will be influenced by the amount of internal and/or external communication used.

H4: Individuals who do not use much internal or external communication will tend to project others in their referent group as having different opinions from their own; individuals who use a great deal of internal and external communication will tend to see others as holding opinions similar to their own. These individuals will use external communication as verification for what has been learned through internal communication.

H5: Individuals who use a great deal of internal communication but not much external communication will tend to see others' opinions as similar to their own; individuals who use a great deal of external communication but not much internal communication will tend to see others' opinions as different from their own.

Study Design

The present study is based on a cross-sectional sample survey of Madison, Wisconsin adults, located on specific streets labeled "neighborhoods." To obtain this sample, 60 listings were selected randomly from the Madison telephone directory and home addresses were noted. These persons were then identified in the Madison City Directory under their street listings. Subsequently, 10 addresses above and 10 addresses below each sample respondent's own address on the same street were selected. Addresses were not used if they were located in apartment complexes or business areas, if the street was too small to be able to select 20 addresses or if a major highway split the selection of respondents. This resulted in a rather "ideal" single-family household situation.

Potential respondents from the first 31 "usable" streets (neighborhoods) were mailed introductory letters stating that a study of Madison neighborhoods was being conducted and their cooperation would be appreciated. The letters specified that someone would be calling them in a week or two to ask if they would agree to participate in the study. The potential respondents were then called and the first 10 individuals from each group of 20 willing to participate were selected and defined as a "neighborhood." Personal interviews subsequently were conducted with the cross-section of male and female heads-of-household (individuals more than 18 years of age), resulting in 297 completed interviews (31 neighborhoods). Thirteen interviews were not completed due to problems with respondents or with interviewers.

Response rates ranged from 50% in some neighborhoods to 100% in others with an average of around 75%. The rather high overall response rate was attributed to the fact that individuals felt they were participating in a

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"neighborhood" study, thus generating an aura of importance and awareness of belonging to a "prestigious" referent group. Lower response rates in some neighborhoods were attributed to the fact that these streets tended to have large numbers of widows or older people and were usually lower status neighborhoods. These respondents tended to be more suspicious of the project and of having individuals come out to interview them personally.

Although the sample was based initially on random selection processes, it is not necessarily representative of the Wisconsin population, or the populations of the city of Madison, because it includes only single-family households on streets large enough to be considered in the sample.

Dormitories, apartment dwellers and condominium owners also were not sampled. However, this procedure was considered the most appropriate as it might increase the probability that respondents knew each other.

The definition of "neighborhood" given to respondents was "those individuals living next door to you or across the street from you on the same street." This definition was explained frequently throughout the interview so that respondents would keep in mind the specific referent group under consideration.

Working within selected topics, opinions were measured through the use of a series of short statements about various controversial issues of interest to the individual. In order to "control" for salience of the issue, two topics from several "levels" of analysis were presented to the respondent; two each from the national level (national defense spending and wilderness development), the state level (nuclear power plant ban and pro-death penalty in the state), the local level (providing a cab-fare subsidy and closing underused schools in the city) and the neighborhood

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level (building a retarded home in the neighborhood and petitioning against a neighbor's solar panel).

After presenting the opinion statements where both sides of the issue were described briefly, the respondents were asked to place themselves in a situation where they must present their opinions on the issues.

For example, when asking respondents' opinions regarding national defense spending, the issue statement read:

Some people in the United States believe that increasing expenditure for national defense is necessary to ensure us of maintaining our national security. Other people disagree with this view. They want to limit defense spending and believe that the money could be better allocated to other services...

They were then asked:

Imagine that you are placed in a situation where you must give your own opinion on the increased expenditure for national defense. What do you think? Do you strongly agree, agree, feel neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree that there should be increased expenditure by the government for national defense?

Respondents also were asked to provide their perceptions of what their neighbors and individuals in the city of Madison would "hold" as opinions on the various issues. (Respondents were not asked for their perceptions of opinion in the city for the two neighborhood issues, building a retarded home and petitioning against a solar panel). Only the questions dealing with own opinions and perceptions of neighborhood opinions are of importance in the present study. The necessary conditions for these responses require that: 1) The person has an evaluative position on an issue; 2) The person expresses an opinion that "accurately" describes his/her location on an evaluative continuum; 3) The person perceives a collective opinion within each referent group and 4) The person is able to express his/her perceived collective opinion for each referent group.

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Measures of internal and external communication and group cohesion and perceived similarity provided the basis for the analysis. Internal communication was measured with the question, "How often do you talk with your neighbors, that is, those people who live near you on this street? Would you say you talk with them frequently, sometimes, rarely or never?"

External communication was measured using two questions: 1) When you read your daily paper and come across the following kinds of stories, how often do you read them? Would you say you frequently, sometimes, rarely or never read: i. Stories about local government and politics; ii. Stories about national government and politics, and 2) About how often do you watch the following kinds of television programs? Do you watch frequently, sometimes, rarely or never: i. National news. ii. Local news.

Due to high zero-order correlations between the national and local newspaper and television measures, these operationalizations were combined to create the external communication variable. The internal communication and the external communication variables were then used to create a general communication variable. This measure consisted of four communication possibilities: 1) low internal, low external, 2) low internal, high external 3) high internal, low external and 4) high internal and high external.

A series of measures dealing with cohesion and similarity were used to form two major indices. The Cohesion index consisted of the following measures:

i. How much do you identify with or feel close to people in your neighborhood, that is, people who live near you on this street? Do you feel very close close, somewhat close or not at all close to them?

ii. For the most part, how close do you think the people in this neighborhood feel to each other? Do you think they feel very close, close, somewhat close, not very close or not at all close to each other?

iii. How much would you say you keep up with what's happening in your neighborhood? (frequently, sometimes, rarely or never)?

iv. How often would you say you get together with other people in this neighborhood? (frequently, sometimes, rarely, or never)?

v. How often would you say you work to bring about changes in your neighborhood? (frequently, sometimes, rarely or never)?

The Similarity index consisted of the following measures:

i. How similar do you think the views of people in your neighborhood are to yours? Do you think their views are very similar, similar, somewhat similar or not at all similar to yours?

ii. How similar do you think the values of people in your neighborhood are to yours? Would you say their values are very similar, similar, somewhat similar or not at all similar to yours?

iii. Would you say your neighbors' stands on political issues are very similar, similar, somewhat similar or not at all similar to yours?

iv. Would you say opinions on important issues of people in your neighborhood are very similar, similar, somewhat similar or not at all similar to yours?

The within-index correlations of the cohesion measures ranged from .25 to .53; the within-index correlations of the similarity measures ranged from .37 to .60. Both indices produced highly reliable results (Cohesion: Alpha = .75; Similarity: Alpha = .77).

A principal component factor analysis provided additional support for treating the measures as two separate indices. (Eigenvalue of the Cohesion factor = 3.10; Eigenvalue of the Similarity factor = .99). These factors were used to create the final Cohesion and Similarity variables. The two variables then were used to create a group characteristics variable. This measure, like the communication measure, consisted of four group interaction possibilities: 1) low cohesion, low similarity, 2) low cohesion, high similarity, 3) high cohesion, low similarity and 4) high cohesion and high similarity.

In order to examine the relationship of group characteristics and communication to the public opinion process, individuals' responses to the question concerning perceptions of others' opinions was subtracted from their own opinion responses. In this fashion, analyses could be conducted to determine whether individuals tended to see others as holding the same or different (liberal or conservative) opinions from themselves.

Results

In order to test the major hypotheses, log-linear analyses were conducted. The log-linear approach provides a unique way of investigating trends in data, more appropriate than that provided by traditional analysis of categorical data (see Upton, 1980; Goodman and Kruskal, 1954; Knoke and Burke, 1980 for discussions). While a thorough discussion of log-linear analysis cannot be presented in the present paper, it is important to note that with this technique, one can determine a model which best "fits" the data, and then examine simultaneously the interrelationships of the important variables within this model. A model, in this sense, is a statement of the expected cell frequencies of a cross-tabulation as a function of parameters (lambda values). In assessing how well a model "explains" or fits the data, one

is concerned with the extent to which the frequencies expected under the model approximate the frequencies actually observed (Knocke and Burke, 1980).

Because there can be many different combinations of variables and many different models, the usual procedure for analyzing data using the log-linear technique is to screen several models to find the one which best "fits" the data. A χ^2 "goodness of fit" statistic can be calculated, and the χ^2 value for the various models can be compared to each other.

Table 1 examines the differences between several possible models for use in the present study. Because the log-linear effects are additive, differences between the models are tested by subtracting the goodness of fit χ^2 values. These differences are distributed as χ^2 and provide a test of whether a given model provides a significant improvement of fit over any other model. In the present study, the model in Table 1 that "fits" the data the best is model (CZ,GZ,IZ,GC) which suggests an interaction between four combinations of variables (group characteristics (G), communication (C), "public opinion" (Z) and type of issue (I)). The model is chosen for the present study because it showed a significantly better fit of the data over all previous "simpler" models in the table. Other models (such as IG, GZ,IZ,GC) did not result in significantly better fits.

-- Table 1 about here --

The importance of the log-linear approach in the present study is not merely the fit of the model, but the relationships between the variables. In order to test the five major hypotheses, parameter estimates (lambda values) are provided, based on the best fitting model. These lambda values estimate the relative odds that an individual's response will be included

in any given category. If other models had been used, they would have resulted in different parameter estimates. However, examination of parameters for several of the other models revealed very similar patterns among the variables.

Table 2 reflects the overall tendencies of individuals to fall within the specific group, communication, and public opinion categories. With regard to cohesion, individuals in the present study tended to fall either in the highly cohesive and highly similar category ($\lambda = .33$; $p < .05$), or in the highly cohesive but perceived dissimilar category ($\lambda = .14$; $p < .05$). There was a statistically significant tendency away from the low cohesive/highly similar category ($\lambda = -.41$; $p < .05$).

-- Table 2 about here --

In terms of communication patterns, there was a statistically significant tendency for respondents to either use very little internal and external communication, or for them to use little internal communication but high amounts of external communication ($\lambda = .57$ and 1.02 respectively ($p < .05$)) (see Table 2). There were significant trends away from the other two communication categories ($\lambda = -1.21$ and $-.38$ respectively ($p < .05$)). (see Table 2). With regard to the public opinion variables, there was a significant likelihood that respondents would see others in the referent group as having either the same opinions as they themselves had ($\lambda = .36$; $p < .05$) or to see their neighbors as having more conservative opinions than their own ($\lambda = .09$; $p < .05$). Respondents did not tend to see others as more liberal than themselves ($\lambda = -.46$; $p < .05$).

Overall then, respondents tended to see themselves as being close to their neighbors, but not necessarily similar to those neighbors, and to see their neighbors as having the same or more conservative opinions than their own. In addition, respondents appeared to use little of either communication source or to use external communication more than internal communication.

A closer investigation of the group characteristic and communication variables in Table 3 provides support for the hypothesis, that highly cohesive individuals would use internal communication ($\lambda = .76, .44, .20, .35; p .05$) and that less cohesive individuals would not ($\lambda = -.68, -.28, -.56, -.23; p .05$). One exception occurred for respondents in the low cohesive/low similarity category who used internal communication in conjunction with external communication ($\lambda = .22; p < .05$).

-- Table 3 about here --

Support was found for the prediction that low cohesive/low similarity individuals would use external communication for exposure to or verification of others' beliefs, attitudes and values ($\lambda = .16; .22; p .05$). However there was also a significant likelihood that these respondents would fall in the low internal/low external communication category ($\lambda = .39; p .05$) and would use only small amounts of either communication source.

As predicted in hypothesis 2, highly cohesive/highly similar individuals are likely to see others as holding the same opinions as their own ($\lambda = .23; p .05$) (see Table 4). For low cohesive/low similarity individuals, the opposite situation is true -- these respondents tend to see others as having different and more conservative opinions from their own ($\lambda = .24; p .05$).

-- Table 4 about here --

With regard to hypothesis 3, there was a slight but nonsignificant tendency for low cohesive/high similarity respondents to see others' opinions the same as their own and for highly cohesive/low similarity respondents to see others' opinions as different from their own.

Finally, the hypotheses for the communication and public opinion variables were tested (see Table 4). Support was found for the hypothesis that individuals low on internal and low on external communication would see others' opinions as different from their own. This tendency was in a liberal direction (λ

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=.14; $p < .05$). In addition, individuals using both communication sources saw others' opinions the same as their own ($\lambda = .16$; $p < .05$). The final hypothesis yielded mixed support. Individuals who used a great deal of external communication but little internal communication did see others' opinions as different from their own ($\lambda = .11$; $p < .05$). However, the hypothesis that individuals high on internal communication but low on external would see others' opinions the same as their own was not supported, although the results were in the right direction ($\lambda = .10$).

Discussion

An interesting approach taken in the present study was the attempt to relate the public opinion, group and communication processes as a series of interactions. While this necessarily imposes a degree of complexity to analysis and interpretation of the findings, such an approach also aids in the understanding of the relationships of each of the variables to the others.

Based on the results of this study, it appears that there are intricate yet interesting relationships between the group characteristic, communication and public opinion variables. Attempts were made to explain some of these relationships and support was found for most of the hypotheses.

Overall, respondents tended to see themselves as being close to their neighbors, but not necessarily similar to those neighbors, and to see their neighbors either as having the same opinions as they had, or more conservative opinions than their own. Respondents also seemed to use either little internal and external communication in the public opinion process, or to use mainly external communication for verification or support of their own opinions and opinion perceptions.

As predicted, highly cohesive respondents used internal communication more than did less cohesive individuals. There also was a tendency for individuals who were low in cohesion and similarity to use external communication as their source for information, although some low cohesive/low similarity respondents tended to use little of either communication source.

Support was found for the hypotheses that highly cohesive/highly similar individuals would see others as holding the same opinions as their own and that low cohesive/low similarity individuals would perceive that others have opinions different from their own. Support also was found for the prediction that individuals using little internal and little external communication would see others as holding different opinions from their own and that individuals using internal and external communication would tend to see others as holding the same opinions as their own. Use of external communication as the main communication source tended to promote different opinion perceptions while use of internal communication as the source tended to promote same opinion perceptions.

Internal communication apparently provided cohesive individuals with information about others' opinions, beliefs and perceptions of opinions within the referent group, and provided immediate reflection of internal beliefs and values. Individuals who were not cohesive tend to either use little internal or external communication or to use mainly external communication. Use of external communication may allow individuals who do not have close links with their referent group to compare their own opinions with others outside the referent group. Highly cohesive and similar individuals saw others as holding the same opinions as their own, while less cohesive and similar individuals saw others as holding different opinions from their own, whether or not this was actually the case.

Obviously, one must be careful of assuming causality in the present study. However, the advantage of the log-linear technique is that it does

not distinguish between the independent and dependent variables. All variables are treated as "response variables" whose mutual associations are explained.

The major findings in the present study reveal that there are associations between group characteristics, communication and public opinion, and that the type of association is dependent upon the degree to which each variable exists or is important to a given individual.

Improved communication, group and opinion measures need to be investigated before the relationship of each to the others can be clearly determined. Some small-scale exploration along these lines in less structured interviews might give some insight into the process involved which cannot be gained from more rigidly structured questionnaires. Panel designs are also important, as these can help determine changes in the variables over time. Monitoring media presentations of issue information could help determine what kinds of information individuals in relevant referent groups are gleaning from the media, while monitoring interpersonal relationships may help determine the roles of interpersonal communication in the public opinion process.

There is also a need for experimental studies that deal with perceptions of others' opinions and own opinions when the "others" are single individuals and when they are groups of individuals. Factors such as the number of others, the ambiguity of others' opinions and cues to others' opinions could be explored in such studies.

The referent groups and its relation to communication and to perceptions of others' opinions and statements of own opinions is apparent and should be considered a vital part of the public opinion process. Even with a loosely

defined group such as the one in the present study, communication patterns of the individual and relations with the referent group resulted in significant differences in each individual's perspective of the group's "public opinion."

Table 1. Significance Tests for Some Log-Linear Models

Model ^a	d.f.	Likelihood χ^2 Ratio	p	χ^2 diff. ^c
I, G, C, Z	368	607.48	.000	
I, GC, Z	362	551.60	.000	55.88*, 6
IZ, GC	345	233.00	1.000	318.60*, 17
GZ, IZ, GC	339	215.00	1.000	18.00*, 6
CZ, GZ, IZ, GC ^b	333	164.63	1.000	50.37*, 6
IG, GZ, IZ, GC	318	176.23	1.000	-11.60, 15

*p .05

^aAbbreviations for variables:

I=issue variables, G= group characteristic variables, C= communication variables, Z= public opinion variables. Combinations (i.e., GC), are interactions between the variables).

^bModel with the best fit.^c χ^2 difference = $\chi_1^2 - \chi_2^2$; $df_1 - df_2$

Table 2. Parameter Estimates (Lambda Values) for the Group Characteristic Variables, the Communication Variables and the Public Opinion Variables for the best fitting model (CZ,GZ,IZ,GC) in Table 1. (Estimates based on 297 respondents).^a

Relationship of Group Characteristics Variables

Low Coh/Low Sim	Low Coh/Hi Sim	Hi Coh/Low Sim	Hi Coh/Hi Sim
-.06	-.41*	.14*	.33*

Relationship of Communication Variables

Low Int/Low Ext	Low Int/ Hi Ext	Hi Int/Low Ext	Hi Int/Hi Ext
.57*	1.02*	-1.21*	-.38*

Relationship of Public Opinion Variables

(Neighbors Seen As:)

Conservative	Same	Liberal
.09*	.36*	-.46*

*p .05

^aDescription of Variables:

Group Characteristic Variables - Group Cohesion and Group Similarity

Communication Variables - Internal Communication and External Communication

Public Opinion Variables - Own Opinions and Perceptions of Others' Opinions (the difference between the two creating a conservative, same and liberal scale).

Table 3. Parameter Estimates (Lambda Values) for the Group Characteristic Variables in Relation to the Communication Variables for the Best Fitting Model (CZ,GZ,IZ,GC) in Table 1.*

Communication Variables	Group Characteristic Variables			
	<u>Low Coh/Low Sim</u>	<u>Low Coh/Hi Sim</u>	<u>Hi Coh/Low Sim</u>	<u>Hi Coh/Hi Sim</u>
Low Int/Low Ext	.39	.86	-.68	-.56
Low Int/Hi Ext	.16	.35	-.28	-.23
Hi Int/ Low Ext	-.77	-.42	.76	.44
Hi Int/ Hi Ext	.22	-.78	.20	.35

* All parameter estimates significant at the .05 level.

Table 4. Parameter Estimates (Lambda Values) for the Group Characteristic Variables in Relation to the Public Opinion Variables and for the Communication Variables in Relation to the Public Opinion Variables for the best fitting model (CZ,GZ,IZ,GC) in Table 1.

Public Opinion Variables	Group Characteristic Variables			
See Neighbors As:	Low Coh/Low Sim	Low Coh/Hi Sim	Hi Coh/Low Sim	Hi Coh/Hi Sim
Conservative	.24*	-.00	-.12	-.14*
Same	-.28*	.04	.01	.23*
Liberal	.04	-.04	.10	-.09

*p .05

^aPublic opinion variables were created by subtracting perceived opinions from stated opinions creating a conservative/same/liberal index (i.e., individuals see neighbors' opinions as more conservative, the same or more liberal than their own).

Public Opinion Variables ^a	Communication Variables			
See Neighbors As:	Low Int/Low Ext	Low Int/Hi Ext	Hi Int/Low Ext	Hi Int/Hi Ext
Conservative	.01	.09	-.13	.02
Same	-.15*	-.11*	.10	.16*
Liberal	.14*	.02	.02	-.18*

*p .05

^aPublic opinion variables were created by subtracting perceive opinions from stated opinions creating a conservative/same/liberal index (i.e., individuals see neighbors' opinions as more conservative, the same or more liberal than their own).

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